

For Immediate Release October 17, 2005

Contacts:

Kuipers' office Darin Ackerman 517-373-6920 Van Woerkom's office

Jeff Cobb 517-373-1635

## Sens. Kuipers, Van Woerkom push pier safety

**GRAND HAVEN** – Troubled by the number of pier-related deaths in Michigan, Sens. Wayne Kuipers, R-Holland, and Gerald Van Woerkom, R-Norton Shores, announced their effort to raise awareness about pier safety and crack down on the theft of life preservers on piers.

The lawmakers joined area leaders and members of the Great Lakes Pier Safety Task Force at a news conference in Grand Haven to announce their legislation. Local activists have begun selling wristbands and produced an educational DVD to increase knowledge about pier safety. Each year, lives are lost during accidents near West Michigan piers.

"While it's unbelievable to me that life preservers are stolen constantly from piers, local law enforcement leaders have told me about this problem," Kuipers said. "This is an important way to make piers safer, while allowing people access to the scenic views the piers offer."

Van Woerkom is sponsoring two resolutions urging the Michigan Department of Natural Resources to increase public awareness and notification of rip currents in the Great Lakes and calling on the Michigan Department of Education to teach pupils about the dangers of rip currents and learn basic pier safety.

Kuipers' legislation would make it a misdemeanor for anyone who tampers with or steals a marine-safety device maintained by the state or a local government. If a person dies or becomes permanently disabled because the device was unavailable or unusable, the offender can be found guilty of a felony.

"Swimming in Lake Michigan should be fun, but too often our community has seen the tragic loss of young people," Van Woerkom said. "I want to improve public awareness of the dangers of rip currents, which often form near piers, so we can prevent future tragedies. We should be stressing pier-safety education to all people — not just those who live along the lakeshore. Even one death is too many."

The Pier Safety Task Force has set up a Web site to provide information. It is located at www.respectthepower.org.